



# elcjh l e-pistle

News from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land

Salaam and grace to you from Jerusalem, City of Peace

May-June 2009

*Praise the Lord! Praise God in his sanctuary, praise him in his mighty firmament!  
Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his surpassing greatness! Praise him with  
trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with  
strings and pipe! Praise him with clanging cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals! Let  
everything that breathes praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! (Psalm 150)*

## Inside:

- 2009 anniversaries
- ELCJHL graduations
- Sr. Sylvia says good-bye
- Bishop comments on pope visit
- Vicar visits Thailand

## Calendar:

- June 6: Organ recital, Redeemer
- June 13: "Sounding Jerusalem" concert, Redeemer
- June 20: Choir concert, Redeemer, 8 p.m.
- June 28: "Sounding Jerusalem" concert, Redeemer, 7:30 p.m.
- July 18: Lior Eitan concert, Redeemer, 8 p.m.
- Aug. 15: Classical Arabic music concert, Redeemer, 8 p.m.
- Aug. 22, School opens, Ramallah
- Aug. 24, School opens, West Bank

## Anniversary celebrations filled with music, praise

The crowds did indeed praise God with tambourines and pipes – bagpipes, to be exact – as they marked three milestones in the life of the ELCJHL recently. The days of May 16-17, 2009, were filled with festive gatherings, parades, dances, exhibits, speeches, dinners and more.

The celebrations were a morale boost for church members and for Arab Palestinian Christianity, Bishop Munib A. Younan said. Further, the response by others was affirming.

"We were thankful that local and international society could appreciate the work of this church and tell us, 'Go forward in what you are doing,'" he said.

Past generations were honored throughout the events.

"We are thankful for those who worked before us and handed us what they have received," Younan said.

"But at the same time, we want to ask our people to continue in this line of serving, because being loyal to our Christian witness, our Christian call and apostolic vocation, is in continuity with Christ's call at the ascension, 'Go to the whole world.'"

The days around the celebration were unusually hectic for the ELCJHL, coming as they did on the heels of the international partners meeting and coinciding with the trip of Pope Benedict XVI to the area.

"We are very happy, after the visit of the pope, to show that there is a witnessing evangelical Lutheran community that is an integral part of the Christian community in Palestine-Israel, Jordan and the Middle East," Younan said.

For full coverage and photos of anniversary activities, see our web site at [http://www.elcjh.org/Anniversary\\_default.asp](http://www.elcjh.org/Anniversary_default.asp). ✕

## ELCJHL schools award diplomas to 123 young people

In a year of ELCJHL milestones, its graduating women and men marked a milestone of their own. Cheered on by family and friends, 123 young people graduated from ELCJHL's four high schools in May. The reality of the occupation of Palestinian lands faded into the background as these young people, with their obvious enthusiasm, spectacularly coiffed hair and sat-



**HAPPY DAYS – Graduates of Talitha Kumi School in Beit Jala smile after tossing roses into the air during their graduation ceremony.**

iny graduation gowns, accepted congratulations and diplomas from school and church leaders.

In addition to musical selections, poems, dabkha dances and the occasional firework, the graduation ceremonies featured the customary speeches from administrators and students.

ies featured the customary speeches from administrators and students.

*Please see Graduation, Page 2*

**Graduation, from p. 1**

“To make an end is to make a beginning,” Hanan Hodaly said at her May 31 graduation ceremony from Talitha Kumi School in Beit Jala. She said she and her 37 classmates relied on each other, as well as parents and teachers, to reach this milestone. “Eventually we managed to overcome every obstacle that we faced,” she said. “For all of this we are deeply grateful.”

Quoting U.S. humorist Mark Twain, Shaima Nader Jamal said, “Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear – not absence of fear,” to the crowd assembled for graduation at the Lutheran School of Hope in Ramallah on May 21. She urged her 37 classmates to be courageous and “chase the dreams you have.”

After thanking each faculty and staff person for

*“May our class reunite in 10 years time in a free Palestine.”*

– Shireen Nabil Atique

**KINDERGARTEN GRADUATES** enjoyed performing the “chicken dance” at their graduation celebration on May 30. The smiles on the parents’ faces indicated they enjoyed it, too.



what they had contributed to her education, Dar al-Kalima graduate Shireen Nabil Atique said, “Look out, here we come into the real world!” She and eight other graduates marked the occasion with a May 22 ceremony at the International Center of Bethlehem. She voiced the hopes of many when she closed her speech saying, “May our class reunite in 10 years time in a free Palestine.”

That statement was echoed by Lutheran School of Beit Sahour graduate Minar Al-Taweel, who said she and her 37 classmates would work hard “to save our country, Palestine.” It is hard to say good-bye to “our second home,” she said at the May 23 ceremony.

ELCJHL Director of Schools Dr. Charlie Haddad told graduates at one school three stories that underscore an important life lesson – to be happy, do what you enjoy and makes you feel proud. He encouraged students to keep moving forward and to view failure as something that strengthens them.

At another school, he encouraged graduates to be responsible for their own learning. At another, he encouraged them to listen to their own hearts and minds and to not be dictated to by family and tradition. All these ideas, he said, are in keeping with the philosophy of ELCJHL schools to help students find and improve their skills and abilities.

At one graduation ceremony, ELCJHL Bishop Munib A. Younan retold a conversation he had had. A young man asked him why he should stay in Palestine and listed his grievances. You are right, the bishop said. But if you leave, who will build justice, the bishop asked him. Another girl asked him about the religious significance of the recent bombardment of Gaza. We should not turn our just political cause into a religious war, he told her, or religion will be used as a tool to defend injustice. He urged graduates and audience members alike to stand firm in Palestine for justice. ✕

## Schools build facilities while students build language skills

Construction is moving along at two of the four Lutheran schools in the West Bank. Although rising construction costs and the troubled international economy have delayed the builders’ schedule, the second floor science labs at Dar Al-Kalima School in Bethlehem will soon be ready for final equipment and furnishings. The three spacious and bright physics, biology and chemistry labs are most welcome after years of waiting. The first floor administrative offices at Dar Al-Kalima still require funding for internal finishing, equipment and furniture. Work at the Evangelical Lutheran School in Beit Sahour has added a third floor for labs and two needed classrooms. This school also needs additional funds for finishing the internal work and purchasing equipment and furniture.

Palestinians recognize the importance of learning other languages. In the Lutheran schools, English instruction begins in Grade 1 and German starts in Grade 3. As one way to reward and encourage stu-

dents for their study, the Lutheran schools hosted two language competitions recently at the Evangelical Lutheran School in Beit Sahour.

At both events, director of education Dr. Charlie Haddad welcomed those present and spoke of the importance of learning other languages as essential for further study, travel, research, and vocational needs. On March 28, the German government sponsored their annual reading competition, which included about 200 area students of various grades. On April 1, the first-ever English competition involved Grade 10 students from the four Lutheran Schools; nine finalists, selected in a first-round competition held in their classrooms, demonstrated their proficiency both in short prepared speeches and impromptu oral readings as independent judges ranked their presentations.

Dr. Charlie complimented all the students and teachers for their hard work and thanked Sr. Sylvia for organizing the event. ✕

### elcjlh e-pistle

is a publication of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.

PO Box 14076  
Muristan Road  
Jerusalem 91140  
Israel

Your comments, critiques and questions are welcome at: [aschmitt@elcjlh.org](mailto:aschmitt@elcjlh.org).



## Celebrating 30, 50 and 170 years

### ELCJHL partners offer affirmations, gifts at anniversary dinner

Amidst the celebration of several ELCJHL anniversaries at a May 18 dinner, Rev. Inken Wöhlbrand commented on the anniversary of another event she deemed a miracle. Twenty years ago the world watched in amazement as the Berlin wall came down. Speaking at a dinner celebrating a trio of ELCJHL anniversaries, Wöhlbrand's comment served as a reminder of Israel's separation wall, just a kilometer and a half from the dinner's Bethlehem venue. It was a somber moment in the otherwise festive occasion, marked by congratulations, speeches and delicious food.

Rev. Hans-Erik Nordin provided another highlight when he presented gifts from his Swedish diocese of Strängnäs. Nordin spoke of coming to the Holy Land as a young man in search of God. He didn't find God in the land, he said, but he found God in the people he met here. With that, he wrapped ELCJHL Bishop Munib Younan in a thick blanket and told him he could use it when he brought his pastors and their families to Strängnäs, at the Swedish dioceses' expense.

Among other speakers congratulating the ELCJHL was Dr. Rafiq Husseini, who expressed his desire to keep Palestinian Christians – the “living stones” – in Palestine. The primarily Lutheran audience was delighted to learn of Husseini's long connection to Lutheranism – the Palestinian Authority chief of staff was born at Augusta Victoria Hospital, the Lutheran

World Federation hospital in East Jerusalem.

Representing the organization that brought the evangelical tradition to the Middle East, Dr. Hans-Jürgen Abromeit said, “We as western Christians received so much from this land” and so were duty-bound to give back. Abromeit is the president of the *Jerusalemsverien* (“Jerusalem Society”), the German mission society whose predecessor organizations began the work that eventually led to the formation of the ELCJHL.

The ELCJHL and the ELCA are “walking companions,” Rev. Rafael Malpica Padilla said, and invited the audience to “dream together one more time the dream of God since creation” – that of creation being one.

Dr. Uwe Gräbe and Rev. Jens Nieper brought greetings from the oldest and the youngest partners of the ELCJHL. Gräbe said the relationship between the ELCJHL and his German-language ministry is one of living “side by side as partners ... for a better future, for justice and peace in this country.” Presenting the ELCJHL with a hand-crafted miniature window, Nieper said the ELCJHL is “a window of hope for the people in this country and the world.”

Archbishop Aris Shirvian likened the ELCJHL to a baby who has grown up and taken on adult responsibilities, citing its leadership role in ecumenical and interfaith initiatives such as the Council of Religious Institutions in the Holy Land. ✕

“We as western Christians received so much from this land.”

– Dr. Hans-Jürgen Abromeit

### ELCJHL partners come together in Bethlehem for annual meeting

The ELCJHL traces its origins to European Lutherans who came to the Holy Land to serve and educate its people. For more than 30 years, the ELCJHL has had spe-

cial relationships with many Lutheran churches around the world. Each year these international partners – collectively known as the Coordination Committee for Co-

operation between the ELCJHL and Overseas Partners, or COCOP – gather for meetings to review all aspects of the ELCJHL mission and to discuss their partner-

ships. In the photo below, representatives of these partner churches paused in their days of meetings to pose for a photo at the International Center of Bethlehem.

At the meeting, partners heard reports from all of the ELCJHL's congregations, the school director, the new women's desk coordinator, the finance department and from the partners themselves.

This year, in addition to the usual agenda, partners also attended events for the ELCJHL anniversaries.

A list of the ELCJHL's COCOP partners can be found on our website at <http://www.elcjh.org/partners/cocop.asp>. ✕

#### **Future COCOP dates:**

- 2010: May 4-7
- 2011: May 10-12



## Education assistant concludes four years of service

*A personal letter from Sr. Sylvia Countess, Assistant to the Director of Education, ELCJHL*

Dear friends:

I will remember my four years here with the schools and educational programs of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land with thanks and gratitude. It has been an honor to live and work with my Palestinian Christian and Muslim colleagues and to share briefly in their lives as they struggle with courage and steadfastness for normalcy during an unjust and unrelenting occupation.

Thank you all for the support you have given to the Lutheran schools in the West Bank and to me. It has been encouraging to see the growing list of individuals, groups, and congregations who have become part of the challenges and hopes of the educational ministry of the ELCJHL. I plan to continue my support of this work however I can, and I hope you will also, especially in these difficult economic times.

Please forward any questions about the educational ministry of the ELCJHL to Dr. Charlie Haddad, Director of Education, at [chaddad@elcjh.org](mailto:chaddad@elcjh.org). Send future postal mail to the Office of Director of Education, Post Office Box 14076, Muristan Road, 91140 Jerusalem.

Some of you know that the Israeli government refused to extend my visa. However, like Joseph after his trials in Egypt, I can say that whatever human schemes may intend, God's plans are for good, and the Spirit is now blowing me toward new adventures. I am grateful to be able to continue to use my experience in education, administration, spiritual direction and pastoral care in new ways as director of vocation and education for the deaconess community of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Although I can never say, like the late Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish, "I come from there," there will always be a place in my heart for this beleaguered place, and I will always think of myself as a bint balad, a daughter of the country.

As always, I ask for your prayers for the peace of Jerusalem; the freedom of Bethlehem and Ramallah and the rest of Palestine; and justice for all God's children. Jesus taught us that we are all God's chosen and beloved.

As sala'amu aleikum! Peace be with you!

Sr. Sylvia Countess

Jerusalem, April 15, 2009

**FAREWELL** – The ELCJHL community bade a fond farewell to Sr. Sylvia Countess (center, photo below), who served as assistant to the Director of Education Dr. Charlie Haddad (left) for four years. Bishop Munib Younan (right) and the rest of the ELCJHL Jerusalem staff gathered to wish Countess well on April 8.



**Azar and fellow participant at LWF conference, the last in a series called "Theology in the Life of the Church." Central themes included biblical interpretation, systematic theology, worship and other practices, and the church's public role in society.**



## Rev. Samer Azar attends LWF theology conference in Germany

ELCJHL Rev. Samer Azar attended "Theology in the Life of Lutheran Churches: Transformative Perspectives and Practices Today" in Augsburg, Germany, in March. The conference, organized by the Lutheran World Federation, brought together more than 100 theologians from 30 countries to develop meaningful theological responses to some of their contextual challenges.

"It was marvelous to experience the diversity within the Lutheran communion today and to learn about the uniqueness of each situation," Azar said. Augsburg, he said, has been an example of Lutheran-Catholic tolerance since 1530.

Azar is the pastor of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Amman, Jordan.

## Pope Benedict XVI in the Holy Land

### Younan says pope's visit a lift for Palestinian, Arab Christians

Bishop Munib A. Younan judged Pope Benedict XVI's recent visit to the Middle East "better than expected." Such high profile visits generally "raise the morale of the Christian community," Younan said. Younan praised the pontiff for calling attention to the significance of Palestinian Christians. Younan said the pope recognized Palestinians' need for justice and human rights and an end to the occupation. Younan said he was "delighted" to hear the pope affirm the need for two states and a shared Jerusalem.

Younan said he appreciated the pope's support for strengthening Muslim-Christian dialogue. This was especially in focus in Jordan, where the pope met with Muslim leaders. Younan said the pope expressed admiration for efforts made by Jordanian faith leaders to promote peaceful coexistence.

Younan attended a gathering at the Notre Dame Center in Jerusalem on May 11 with the pope and other faith leaders. The two had a brief exchange in which the pope, upon learning that Younan is a Jerusalem resident, asked for a blessing from him.

Younan's one complaint about the visit was that security measures made it difficult for people to see the Holy Father.

"We could not understand the tough security measures," Younan said. "The people wanted to see him and greet him and speak to him, but unfortunately, the tough security measures caused many, many people not see him."

The pope celebrated mass at Manger Square in Bethlehem on May 13. Younan was glad to see that he was able to interact there with local people, including Gazan Christians, who were allowed to travel to Bethlehem for the event.

"The pope appreciated the role of Lutherans in this part of the world," Younan said, noting the high degree of cooperation between Catholics and Lutherans in Israel-Palestine. The pontiff's visit underscores the interdependence of Christians in the Holy Land. "We need each other here," Younan said, to work and witness together for the sake of Christ and for the sake of justice, peace and reconciliation. ✕

*"The pope appreciated the role of Lutherans in this part of the world."*

– Munib Younan

### Tannous sees parallels between Dalit, Palestinian struggles

Just as Saul gave up persecuting Christians once he encountered Jesus, so too will the oppressors of Palestinians and Dalits become their defenders if they "show [their] enemies the face of Jesus," Ashraf Tannous said. This was one of Tannous' impressions of his trip to Bangkok, Thailand, last March to attend the Lutheran World Federation's Global Ecumenical Conference on Justice for Dalits. Dalits are people who have been marginalized in some south Asian societies. The conference sought to promote international ecumenical solidarity in securing justice and raising awareness of the Dalit's struggle for survival.

Tannous said he sees similarities between the situations of Dalits and Palestinians, noting their shared history of having their villages burned and being humiliated, oppressed and killed. "I am

persecuted by Israelis for being Palestinian, regardless of religion," he said, and Dalits are persecuted for being Dalits. He found the Dalits he met there to be well educated, social, humorous and curious about others.

Tannous, who served for the last year as vicar for the ELCJHL congregation in Ramallah, said he knew nothing about Dalits before the confer-

ence but found the experience inspiring.

"I'll be more open to not only fight for my case, but to fight for all the cases that are similar to my case as a Palestinian and as oppressed people," he said. He was impressed with the way Dalits make their case and draw the world's attention to it. To end oppression of all forms, "we have to shout to the world" together, he said.

But he found it shocking that even Christians mistreat Dalits. Another surprise was host country itself.

"Thailand is a very nice country with very poor people," he said. The prevalence of prostitution was shocking and people's suffering was evident in their eyes, he said.

You can read more about the conference at: <http://tiny.cc/DuEw3> ✕

**ELCJHL VICAR Ashraf Tannous (center, bottom) joined more than 100 theologians from around the world for the Global Ecumenical Conference on Justice for Dalits in Bangkok.**



## Visiting bishops meet with Fayyad, Jerusalem church leaders

**PM VISIT – (from left) Bishops Helga Haugland, Dr. Hans-Jürgen Abromeit, Bishop Munib Younan, P.A. Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, Rev. Hans-Erik Nordin and Dr. Kholoud Dubeis-Abu Dayyah in Ramallah.**

A delegation of Christian leaders met with Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Salam Fayyad at his Ramallah office on May 18. He said it was a “matter of high national interest” to help Palestinian Christians stay in the country. Diversity and peaceful coexistence are key to Palestine’s survival, he said. P.A. Minister of Tourism Dr. Kholoud Dubeis-Abu Dayyah also participated in the meeting. Bishop Munib A. Younan led the group on visits to the prime minister as well as local church leaders amidst his church’s anniversary celebrations. Asked about the contribution of the church to Palestinian society, Fayyad said the church promotes love, justice, peace, tolerance, coexistence and non-violence. This, in his perception, “is what Jesus Christ embodies,” he said. For this reason, the church is uniquely suited to build

bridges between faith traditions, he said. When Younan proposed that faith leaders meet regularly with government officials to voice their needs, Fayyad said, “You’re pushing an open door here.”

Meeting with Greek Orthodox Patriarch Theophilos III, VELKD Presiding Bishop Dr. Johannes Friedrich, asked the patriarch about the future of the Middle East Council of Churches. The patriarch agreed for the need to reform the troubled organization and decide “if we are ready to serve the needs of the Christians in the Middle East.”

At a meeting with Latin Patriarch Fuad Twal, Younan expressed gratitude that Pope Benedict XVI had addressed the needs of Palestinian Christians during his recent visit to the Holy Land. Asked if the pontiff’s visit would strengthen church relations, Twal said relations are already good and that being a tiny minority brings Palestinian Christians of different traditions together. The group met with Canon Samir Habibi at the Episcopal diocese. A long-time resident of the United States, Habibi told the group “There is a mood in the U.S. to do something about the Middle East.” ✕



## Special guests, members speak about ELCJHL history and heritage

**ANNIVERSARY INTERVIEWS – Rev. Ibrahim Azar, center, interviews long-time ELCJHL members Abu Moussa, left, and Aida Haddad, right. The interviews were part of the**

The planting of 28,000 orange trees, the introduction of fine tailoring, the first female photographer, a book of Palestinian proverbs – “There is a lot to be proud of in our history,” Rev. Mitri Raheb said as he helped emcee a special anniversary program. Prominent people were interviewed on the topics of witness and memory, roles and visions, and ministry and presence before a large audience at the International Center of Bethlehem on May 16.

On the topic of witness and memory, Mrs. Aida Haddad talked about how her family was kicked out of their home in 1948. It was the church who welcomed them, renting them a room in a monastery.

Abu Moussa, who was a member of the original ELCJHL church council at its formation in 1959, talked about how people used to call their church “evangelical” rather than “Lutheran.” Asked if the church had changed, Moussa said, “The church is a living organism.” Change and improvement are inevitable. The most important thing, he said, is to “keep the message that gave us our Savior.”

A graduate of the Lutheran school system, Palestinian Authority Minister Dr. Kholoud Dubeis-Abu Dayyah said the Lutheran church plays an important role in fostering religious dialogue and in being a leading voice for justice for Palestinians.



When the P.A. took responsibility for educating its children in 1994, it had no textbooks, said Mr. Abdullah Shakarneh, P.A. education director for the Bethlehem District. Palestine is the only Arab country, he said, to create textbooks for its Christian schools. The Lutheran church was instrumental in this effort.

Yusef Daher, executive secretary of the Jerusalem Inter-Church Centre, said the Lutheran church plays an important role in forging compromises among Jerusalem’s Christian churches.

Others talked about the importance of strengthening Palestinian identity, capitalizing on Palestinian creativity and seeking a vision for the church through prayer.

ELCJHL Pastor Imad Haddad summed up the church’s history and vision nicely: “Our program is love, hope and faith.” ✕